1. Description of Grant-Supported Activity

In my original grant proposal, I planned on submitting an article to a peer-reviewed journal on what I currently term mana realism, a concept which aims at critiquing and redefining the controversial literary mode of magic realism, with a particular focus on Māori literature. This theoretical paradigm acknowledges yet departs from Eurocentric and postcolonial theoretical concepts, such as magical realism and trauma realism, and situates contemporary Māori literature in English within both its national literary canon and that of indigenous literatures of the Pacific.

In a 1993 interview with Vilsoni Hereniko, Albert Wendt stresses the importance of realism in Pacific literature against the popular wave of postmodern writings. Even though the literary critics of the time were branding Pacific literature as passé because of its reliance on the realist tradition, Wendt argues in that interview that realism plays a very specific role for Pacific writers: it is a means through which they process the effects of colonialism and, in this respect, fiction is envisioned as an instrument for social change. Mana realism is designed as a theoretical shift from postcolonial paradigms centering on the traumas of colonialism to focus on the concept of mana as a cultural concept that exists before, during, and beyond colonialism. It is through the concept of mana as an expression of power and authority originating from ancestral traditions that ties daily life, history, and mythology that I propose to read Māori writing in English. Indeed, through mana realism, I redefine and relocate realism within the specific location, literary traditions, and cultures of Aotearoa/New Zealand. In this respect, mana realism is inspired by Kaupapa Māori research (a Māori-centered critical approach).

2. Were you able to complete the project? Describe any difficulty you had.

What I proposed to do in the grant:

A. Apply for an external, international grant targeting New Zealand Studies Outcomes:
   I applied – alas, unsuccessfully -- for a John Stout Fellowship.

B. Submit an article to a peer-reviewed journal

Recent developments have caused me to rethink this project: it will no longer be an article, but a chapter in a monograph on Witi Ihimaera scheduled to be published in fall 2014 by Kakapo Books. Kakapo Books is a UK publisher specialized in New Zealand and Pacific literature. Publications by Kakapo Books publications are refereed.
3. Did, or will, the project result in a specific product -- a manuscript, composition, syllabus, etc? If so, please describe and indicate state of development.

I presented a preliminary version of my work on mana realism to one of the main international conferences in my field, the New Zealand Studies Association (NZSA), in summer 2012 at the University of Gdansk, Poland. Shortly thereafter, the founder of NZSA asked me if I was interested in writing one of the New Zealand Writers Series on Witi Ihimaera, hence my decision to turn this project into a book chapter.

I have also integrated part of my research in the graduate course I am currently teaching this semester on the Māori Renaissance.

I am therefore very grateful for receiving a Faculty Research Grant. This grant is not only enhancing my teaching, but it has also indirectly allowed me to secure a publication by a respected publisher in my field.